**Looking at Student Work**

**Reading, Writing, & Research – Middle School**

**Unit Plan**

**Diary of an Immigrant**

You will be asked to write a diary entry in the persona of an immigrant coming to the United States. It will describe your arrival to America. Requirements and helpful questions for this entry are covered below. Remember that this is a challenging assignment. You are being asked to take new information and use it in a creative way that shows your understanding of the issues of immigration.

The purpose of this entry is to describe what happened to you and your family when you landed at Ellis Island or Angel Island (Chinese and Japanese immigrants). The following are requirements and helpful questions:

1. Describe your first sight of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, or Angel Island. What do you feel? How do the other members of your family feel? What is happening around you on the deck of the ship?
2. Are there rumors or worries about what will happen to you when you land? Do you hear that some people are sent back or taken away? Are people offering advice on what to do or say when you meet immigration officials?
3. What are your dreams and hopes for your new life in America? What are your fears and worries about a new life in America?
4. Describe getting off the ship, landing and the process the immigration officials put you through. Do you feel welcome, afraid, confused? Do you see someone else being rejected by the immigration officials? Was your family separated for some reason? Those who land at Angel Island should include a reaction to some of the poems carved into the walls of the barracks.
5. How do those poems make you feel? What are your feelings after you have been allowed into America? Did everyone in your family get in? Are you being met by a relative, a friend or an employer? Where do you plan to settle?
6. Make a prediction for your future in America. Will your dreams come true?

**Context**

This task falls during the eighth and ninth week of a twelve-week unit on immigration that our eighth grade class does during the first half of the school year. At the beginning of the unit, students are put into "family groups" and asked to create a character profile of who they are. Each member of the group is asked to take on the persona of a member of a family planning on immigrating to America. The families are each assigned an originating country. Prior to this assignment, students had done individual and group research on their country of origin as well as a character sketch. They had done several other social studies and language arts assignments related to immigration and had had some direct instruction laying the groundwork in social issues. Students had also been studying immigration in general for the previous eight weeks. As a part of their research, students were given primary source diary entries to read and comment on.

**What This Task Accomplishes**

This task asks students to bring together a number of different skills. They need to be able to read and understand primary source documents. They also need to be able to use the writing process and write in a specific genre. Students are asked to self and peer-edit their work, revise and rewrite.

**Related Standards**

***From Standards for the English Language Arts***

**Standard 1**

Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among the texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

**Standard 4**

Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

***From National Standards for United States History***

**Standard 2**

Students should understand massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity. Students should be able to demonstrate understanding of the sources and experiences of the new immigrants by: a) tracing the patterns of immigrant settlements in different regions of the country; and b) analyzing the obstacles, opportunities and contributions of different immigrant groups.

**Standard 2D in Historical Thinking Skills**

Students should be able to evidence historical perspectives - the ability: a) to describe the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts and the like; and b) to avoid "present-mindedness", judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

**What the Student Will Do**

Students should work individually on writing the diary entries. They have done their research on immigration in general and their specific countries while in family groups. Some groups may choose to do their research together while others may choose to do research individually and then share with the group. They should have researched primary diary sources, so that they are familiar with the style and genre. Also, family groups need to have chosen specific events that everyone in the family experiences. These common threads should be seen in the diary entries. They should begin by outlining or mapping their entry as a way of organizing their thoughts. Students should then write a rough draft. Once this is done, they can self-edit their work and make changes. Students should also peer-edit with at least one other student. Finally, the student should have a teacher or adult conference. After their drafts are rewritten, students will submit the final draft of their diary entry.

**Teaching Tips**

Students should be well immersed in learning about immigration and their family groups before they start to write their own diary entries. When choosing family groups, make sure that you assign realistic countries for the students to study. Assign countries on which students will be able to find information. Many times students will want to be from a country that is a part of their own cultural background. Instead, assigning children to countries with which they have had no experience leads to greater historical and cultural understanding. Also, many students have had little or no experience with primary source documents and may not be familiar with how to read historical sources. Be sure that students have had ample practice reading and understanding primary source documents, so that they have models for their diary writing.

It is often helpful to share the assessment rubric with the students before they begin the assignment. This way, students are clear on what the expectations are for the assignment. Once your students are familiar with the concept of rubrics, you can ask them to create their own rubrics for assignments.

Familiarize your students with the writing process that you want them to use. Make sure they know how many drafts and conferences you expect, so there are no misunderstandings.

Before you begin this task, contact your library research person to find out what information and types of resources are available for the children to use in their research. Find out if there are any inter-library loan services or college libraries that you can use.

**Resources**

Addams, Jane. Twenty Years at Hull House. Signet Classic, 1981.

Ashabranner, Brent. Still a Nation of Immigrants. Cobblehill Books, 1993.

Daniels, Roger. Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life. Harper Perennial Library, 1991.

Grossman,Sari and Joan Brodsky Schur, ed. In a New Land: An Anthology of Immigrant Literature. National Textbook Co., 1994.

Lawlor, Veronica, ed. I Was Dreaming to Come to America: Memories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Viking Children's Book, 1995.

Levine, Ellen. If Your Name Was Changed at Ellis Island. Scholastic, 1993.

Riis, Jacob. How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York. Dover Publications, 1971.

Wilson, Wendy S. and Jack Papadonis. Ellis Island and Beyond. J. Weston Walch Pub., 1996.

CD-ROM, "Journey to America"

Ellis Island Website, [www.ellisisland.org](http://www.ellisisland.org/)

**Extensions**

To make this task more manageable for fifth graders or for students needing extra assistance, we suggest giving them more structure. Provide research sheets for them to fill out. Have students do research in groups. Guide students in how to write their diaries with specific details they need to use in each paragraph.

To increase the difficulty for students, we suggest asking them to do additional research. Several of our students did independent research at a local college library and shared the information with the class. Others read additional books to add to their own understanding.

**Interdisciplinary Links**

***Math***

Ask students to research the number of people in the immigration wave. Were there significant differences throughout the years? Were immigrants from certain countries more prominent? How many immigrants eventually returned to their homeland? Ask students to chart and graph this information.

How long would certain journeys take? Ask students to find out how long a journey would be from their "family's" homeland. Factor in trains, boats and weather. What would the journey cost from Western Europe? Eastern Europe? Japan? China?

***Science***

Find out about wind and weather patterns. How may this have affected the immigration patterns? How did agriculture and geography affect immigration? How did disease affect immigrants? How does disease spread?

***Geography***

Ask students to find their country of origin on the map. Have students fill in maps of Europe, Asia and North America so they are familiar with the geographical location of homelands. Compare what a map of the world looked like in 1900 to what a map looks like today. What are some of the changes that have taken place? Where have the most changes occurred?

***Social Studies***

What were the political climates in the countries of origin? What were the social climates? How may these have affected immigration?

Find out where your family came from originally. Interview parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles. Make a family tree.

***Art/Music***

Research the different cultures from the originating countries. Are there specific art forms that are prevalent? How does the art reflect the cultural or political atmosphere? What types of music or dance are popular? Make up a song or dance in the style of your "family's" country.

***Technology***

Have your students conduct on-line research about immigration. Ask students to use web resources to construct a "genealogy" for their family groups. Locate websites relating to Ellis and Angel Islands.

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**Rubric**

**Research:** Questions, Strategies,  Selecting relevant information, Planning

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| **Warning** | • Selects a topic to investigate with assistance.  • Uses research process with assistance.  • Selects information, often copying phrases.  • Follows organizational plan with supervision. |
| **Needs Improvement** | • Chooses a topic and narrows it.  • Follows a provided research plan or process.  • Selects information based on topic and summarizes or paraphrases.  • Organizes time and resources based on models, peer support, group work. |
| **Proficient** | • Forms and pursues a question.  • Develops a way of researching the question or pursuing the point of view.  • Selects relevant sources and information.  • Organizes time and resources independently. |
| **Advanced** | • Develops thoughtful and original questions.  • Pursues research strategies that are well-matched to the question (e.g. observation, interviews, data collection, and reading) and recognizes new questions or issues as they arise.  • Selects relevant and powerful information from a range of diverse sources.  • Organizes time and resources to allow for verification, reflection and revision. |